THE LARGEST WOODEN KHANQAH OF ASIA KHANQAH KHAPLU

Before Renovation

After Renovation

DESIGN AND PRINT BY DANIYAL MONDOQ
0340-5781811

Meaning of Khanqah:

The word Khanqah is of Persian origin, derived from khana-gah, a dwelling place In the Indian subcontinent, it commonly refers to a Muslim place of worship where the shrine of a saint is located and where the saint's successor (Sajjadah-nashin) resides.

In Noorbakhshia terminology, khanqah refers specifically to a mosque or Jamia Masjid that contains chambers (hujras or chillakhanas) built for the spiritual training of disciples (salikeen). Here, under the guidance of a Murshid (spiritual teacher), they engage in worship and discipline for their spiritual and moral purification, striving to become spiritually perfected (kāmil) individuals. In Noorbakhshi tradition, the khanqah is understood as a sacred multipurpose complex that serves as the central mosque for daily and Friday prayers, a center of religious education and guidance and a spiritual retreat dedicated to inner purification and moral refinement.

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Short Introduction of the Noorbakhshia Sect:

Hazrat Mir Syed Muhammad Noorbakhsh (1396–1464 CE) was born in Qahistan and passed away in Solqan, a suburb of Tehran, capital of Iran, where his blessed shrine still exists. From an early age, he excelled in both outward (exoteric) and inward (esoteric) sciences. Owing to his spiritual perfection and noble character, he was honored with the titles Mahdi Ghaus al-Mutakhireen and Noorbakhsh. To present Islam in its pure prophetic spirit and to promote unity among Muslims, he authored foundational works of the Noorbakhshia school of thought including Kitab I'tiqādiyah(on Usul al-Din – Principles of Faith) and Kitab al-Fiqh al-Ahwat (on Furu' al-Din – Jurisprudential matters). These are regarded as the fundamental reference books of the Noorbakhshia tradition.

He proclaimed the inclusive principle: "Anyone who performs prayer facing the Qiblah is to be regarded as a Muslim." The Noorbakhshia path is known for its moderation, its strict adherence to the Qur'an and Sunnah and its avoidance of both extremism and innovation. In addition to the five daily prayers, followers gather in mosques and khanqahs for Awrad fatiha (great supplications), recited aloud every morning and evening with deep humility and devotion.

History of Khanqah Muallah Khaplu:

Khanqah MuallaH Khaplu Bala was constructed by Mir Mukhtar Akhyar (late) (d. 1124 AH / 1712 AD). After its establishment, his son Mir Muhammad became Mirwaiz (preacher) and this sacred duty continued in his family.

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In 1925–1926, Syed Mukhtar Hussain of Keris was appointed Mirwaiz, and since then this responsibility has been carried out by his family to the present day.

The main prayer hall measured 61 × 63 ft (3,843 sqft), with 07 rooms on the northern side, 05 rooms on the southern side and 12 small chillakhanas for spiritual seclusion. The structure was supported by 06 measuring 6.4 ft, 03 measuring 3.4 ft and 19 (2.3 ft) thick wooden pillars.

The foundation was laid in 1116 AH and the structure was completed in 08 years. It is regarded as the largest Khanqah in Baltistan and the tallest single-storey building in Gilgit-Baltistan. The old Khanqah had the capacity to accommodate about 2,000 worshippers. After nearly 300 years, expansion became necessary.

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Architecture (Fann-e-Tameer):

Islamic architecture in Baltistan was first introduced by Mir Syed Ali Hamadani (RA) . The credit for developing and promoting this art on a wide scale in Baltistan goes to Amir Mukhtar (1132 AH / 1720 AD), who built 15khanqahs across the region. Under his supervision, KhanqahMu'allaKhapluBala was also constructed and completed.During the expansion of KhanqahMu'alla, the Construction Committee carefully preserved its original architectural character, extending the structure in the same traditional model. Local wood, stone and clay (haj) were used, making the building earthquake-resistant, durable and aesthetically remarkable. The doors, windows, minbar (pulpit) and mihrab exhibit fine wood-carving, inlay work and geometric motifs, beautifully blending Iranian, Kashmiri and Mughal styles. The ceiling carvings, locally known as Khatam-e-Bām, reflect masterful craftsmanship.The elegant models of Khatam-e-Bām and Panjaras—of which there are several distinct types have been skillfully incorporated in this khanqah with great refinement, making them truly worth seeing.

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Ceiling features (Khatam-e-Bām):

1) Yong Drong 2) Tamar Char

Lattice patterns (Panjarah):

1. Kandor 2)Spider(Ankaboot) 3)Six-headed 4)Four-headed 5) Eight-headed 6) Twelve-headed 7) Sixteen-headed 8) Roman Beshit 9) Jan Shereen 10) Shishish 11) Heshneik 12) Poshtmahi 13) Bandromi 14) Waterfall (Abishar) 15) River Wave (MojDariya) 16) MojHaider 17) Moj Hassan 18) MojBastweek 19) Paper House (KaghazGhar)

All of the above works such as Panjaras and Khatam-e-Bām were executed in dedicated phases. However, Yong Darang and Tamar Char were crafted only in the final stage of the Khatam-e-Bām process, marking the true completion of the masterwork.

Need for Construction and Expansion of Khanqah:

At the Khānqāh Muallah in Khaplu, along with the Friday and the 'Eid prayers, majālis are also held during Muharram, attended by a large number of Noorbakhshi followers from across Khaplu. With the rapidly growing population, the expansion and reconstruction of the khanqah had become inevitable. For this purpose, a Construction Committee was formed under the leadership of the Mirwaiz of the KhānqāhMu'allā, Syed HimayatAli (late) and it was unanimously decided that the khanqah would be expanded strictly in the original stylewithout the addition of any modern or alien features.The architectural character of the old khanqah represents a distinctive blend of Kashmiri and Iranian artistic traditions, showcasing exceptional mastery in woodwork, carving and engraved ornamentation. This craftsmanship has been carefully preserved and much of it still survives in its splendid and admirable state.

Since 2005, the Construction Committee has been carrying out the expansion work, which continues to this day. All the main pillars and capitals are made of walnut wood, while the other structural elements are crafted from eucalyptus. The entire cost of walnut and eucalyptus wood was generously contributed by the local community.

Comparative Overview (Old vs New)

(Old building) (New building)

Feature	Old Building	New Building
Area	63 × 61 = 3,843 sqft	164 × 100 = 16,400 sqft
Columns (wood beams)	6	40
Wall thickness / Height	4.4 ft / 19 ft	6.4 ft / 25 ft
Chambers (Chillakhana)	12	19
Ceiling height	36 ft	50 ft, with 20 × 20 ft space beneath a 38-ft dome (gunbad)
Main gates	3	5
Prayer capacity	1,500	3,000
Ceiling carvings (Khatam-e-Bām)	1	6

Public Support and Sacrifices:

When the Khanqah Committee announced that the expansion of KhanqahMu'alla would not be possible without incorporating the residential houses located to its right, left and rear, it resolved to undertake this responsibility with great effort and dedication. After dialogue, consultation and negotiations, the Committee constructed new residential houses and handed them over to the owners of the 28 old houses, after which the demolition of the old structures commenced. For the successful completion of this massive and labor-intensive project, worth millions of rupees, generous contributions in cash, walnut wood and other construction materials were provided by local residents as well as benefactors from within the country and abroad. Men, women, youth and the elderly all participated with a spirit of faith and devotion. For nearly 25 years, people from all walks of life extended their support with religious zeal for the successful completion of this demanding project. The Construction Committee expresses its heartfelt gratitude to all of them and prays that Almighty Allah may grant them the highest reward. Ameen.

Abdul Ali (Head Carpenter)

Muhammad Ibrahim, Shabbir Hussain, Abdul Ali.

Expenditure (to date):

Approximately Rs. 40 million (40 crore) have been spent transparently on the expansion. Around 25 residential houses were demolished; alternative houses were constructed and handed over to them and the affected families were respectfully relocated. Construction and expansion are continuing successfully.

Members of the Construction Committee:

Syed Himayat Hussain Almosavi (Late),
Mirwaiz – Khanqah Mu'alla Khaplu(Founder)

- Haji Akhond Qurban Sahib – Dinis
- Haji Facho Alī Sahib – Hatchi
- Ehsan Alī Sahib – Hatchi
- Ghulam Raza Bugti Sahib – Hatchi
- Dr. M. Ismail Sahib – Goma Staqji
- Subedar Bilal Sahib – Hundili
- Munshi Musa (Late) – Hundili
- Muhammad Yousuf Sahib – Khansar
- Muhammad Sahib – Khansar
- Master Shakoor Sahib – Sergiab
- Haji Muhammad Cho Sahib – Sergiab
- Master M. Jaffar Sahib – Muldumar
- Haji Ibrahim Seth (Late) – Muldumar
- Seth Anwar Alī Sahib – Muldumar
- Ahmed Ali Sahib – Muldumar
- Ghulam Alī Chauhan Sahib – Muldumar
- Ghulam Nabi (Late) – Garbong
- Master M. Saleem (Late) – Garbong
- Chairman M. Yousuf (Late) – Sergrong
- Khalid Ahmed – Garbong
- Haji Alī (Late) – Sergrong
- Haji Muhammad Iqbal – Muldumar
- Ishaq Shakir Sahib – Stronpi
- Insaf Rasool Sahib – Stronpi
- Abdul Rahim Advocate - Sergaib

Members of the Construction Committee:

- Abdul Ali (Head Carpenter) – Barah Bala
- Abdul Hussain – Chorbat
- Hussain – Hatchi
- Muhammad Ibrahim – Hundili
- Shabbir Hussain – Goma Staqji

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